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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

FRIDAY, JANUARY 26, 2007

In Today's Papers

TUSIAD Appoints Woman Head; Engages in Political Debate

All papers report that on Thursday, Turkey's influential business grouping TUSIAD appointed its first woman head, Arzuhan Dogan Yalcindag, replacing Omer Sabanci. Yalcindag is a leading executive in Turkey's largest media conglomerate Dogan Group, owned by her father Aydin Dogan.

Meanwhile, a duel of words between TUSIAD's former president Omer Sabanci and Turkey's extreme right Nationalist Action Party (MHP) leader Devlet Bahceli intensified as the two argued over TUSIAD's suggestion that languages other than Turkish be offered in the Turkish school system as elective courses. Bahceli had recently said some democratization proposals put forth by TUSIAD were similar to the goals of the PKK. Sabanci denounced Bahceli by saying that politicians had to measure the implications of their statements. Bahceli fired back by reiterating his earlier remarks, saying that making Kurdish language education part of the Turkish education system was the PKK's primary political goal. He noted that the PKK was trying to find a legitimate ground for its separatist policies.

Turkish-Armenian Relations

Papers report that the Turkish Foreign Ministry (MFA) said Thursday "this is nothing new" when commenting on Armenian Deputy Foreign Minister Arman Kirakosian's remarks that Armenia was ready to establish ties with Turkey without preconditions. In a statement, the MFA indicated that the Armenian government had made similar remarks in the past. The MFA said Turkey took a number of concrete steps in the past to further improve dialogue with Armenia, adding, "We hope that the tragic incident [assassination of Dink] last week will contribute to a new atmosphere in Turkish-Armenian relations, and Armenia will respond to our good-willed efforts to overcome the stagnation in our ties."

Gul Attends Lebanon Donors Conference in Paris

All papers report Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul, in Paris to participate in a donors' conference for Lebanon, met on the sidelines of the meeting with Secretary Rice and his French and German counterparts and the Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora. Gul and Rice discussed Iraq, terrorism, and Lebanon. Gul said these issues would again be raised during his upcoming visit to the US in February.

US Ambassador Ross Wilson on the PKK, Kirkuk, Possible Armenian Genocide Bill
Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Radikal, Cumhuriyet, Zaman, Yeni Safak and others report Ambassador Ross Wilson addressed a gathering at the Ankara think tank, the Eurasian Research Center (ASAM), commenting on US-Turkey ties, Iraq and the PKK. On the controversial issue of Kirkuk, Ambassador Wilson said, "Many Turks suggest that Kirkuk is like Iraq in miniature and that a referendum in 2007 will ignite new sectarian violence. We agree Kirkuk is sensitive. We also believe that no outside power, including the US, should dictate to the Iraqis how to deal with their internal issues." On Iran, Wilson said Turkey was supporting the efforts of the US, the EU and the UN. On the PKK, the Ambassador noted that northern Iraq must be prevented from being used as a base for launching terrorist attacks against Turkey. Responding to a question about a possible Armenian genocide bill to be raised in the US Congress, Radikal reports that Wilson said, "We oppose attempts to make political determinations on the terminology of this tragedy. The Bush Administration will continue to oppose a resolution on this issue."

Kurdish Parliament Wants US to Convince Turkey Not to Interfere in Iraq
The leftist/nationalist Cumhuriyet reports the Kurdish regional

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parliament in northern Iraq said in a final statement following their special session on Turkey held earlier this week that the United States must persuade Turkey not to interfere in Iraq's domestic affairs. It also invited Turkish government officials to Kurdistan for the Turks to see the local realities for themselves.

Editorial Opinion on the State of the Union, Freedom of Expression Legislation
Hasan Mesut Hazar writes from Washington in the conservative/nationalist Turkiye: "During his fifty minute 'State of the Union' speech, President Bush first gave information on his domestic and foreign policies and then, urged the Congress to support his new Iraq plan. He said 'we have to correct the grave situation in Iraq, so, please give it one last chance.' Two-thirds of the public in the US were against Bush's new Iraq policy and this opposition is reflected in the Congress -- not only Democrats but some of Republican Congressmen as well oppose the new Iraq policy. The Congress was hoping that Bush would listen to the Iraq Study Group's report and plan accordingly. However, Bush just ignored the report and the public opinion, and made his own plan. That is why he couldn't get the expected support from the Congress. It is obvious that there are very hard days ahead for President Bush. It is hard to guess how President Bush can pull his country out of the swamp of Iraq, but, let us hope that he won't take another mad action and attack Iran."

Erdal Guven comments in the intellectual Radikal: "The code name for the fascist atmosphere which set the stage for Dink's murder is Article 301 [the article in the Turkish Penal Code making it a crime to 'insult Turkishness']. Weren't all the journalists, academicians and authors attacked at the court house during their trials for 301 violations? As long as Article 301 hangs over freedom of expression like the sword of Damocles, Turkish politicians' remarks like 'we are not implementing reforms for the EU but for our people' will be completely baseless. The Turkish President, Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, and party leaders should all have attended Dink's funeral. No excuses are acceptable. They will not be able to erase this shame, but by erasing 301 maybe they can decrease this shame to a certain extent. No matter how powerful they are no political power in Turkey can eliminate racism, poverty, lack of education, and unfair treatment over night. But they can eliminate 301. We owe Hrant Dink one other funeral ceremony: the funeral for Article 301.

For how long we will postpone this already belated ceremony?"

TV Highlights
NTV (6 a.m.)

Domestic News

- A funeral service will be held for former Foreign Minister Ismail Cem on Friday. Prime Minister Erdogan and former Greek Foreign Minister George Papandreou will participate in the ceremony in Istanbul.
- Prime Minister Erdogan hosted a dinner in honor of the Ambassadors of EU countries. EU envoys praised the Turkish government and nation's reaction to the killing of Hrant Dink.
- State Minister Ali Babacan said changes to Article 301 would be "a difficult issue."
- Transport Minister Binali Yildirim said a new bill containing regulations regarding Internet cafes and websites has been submitted to the parliament for approval.
- The number of foreign tourists visiting Turkey dropped by 6.2 percent last year.

International News

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- The Greek Cypriot administration strongly criticized two German lawmakers who traveled to northern Cyprus using Ercan Airport in the north.
- World powers in Paris have pledged more than USD 4 billion in loans, donations and other help for Lebanon.
- An Israeli parliamentary panel approved a request by President Katsav to take a leave of absence after prosecutors prepared criminal charges against him for alleged rape and sexual misconduct.
- Nine Palestinians, including Hamas security members, were wounded by a roadside bomb in Gaza yesterday.

<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/ankara/>

WILSON